

Cultural Resources Management and Aviation History

Kevin J. Foster

As the preceding article by Paul Diebold indicates, until recently, historical aviation sites and aircraft were largely overlooked by cultural resources management (CRM) professionals. This situation is changing. Early this year, the National Maritime Initiative of the National Park Service's History Division began a cooperative project with the U.S. Navy, acting on behalf of all of the military services, to help preserve what remains of aviation material culture.

The choice of the Maritime Initiative program to pioneer aviation CRM efforts in the National Park Service was not as strange as it might seem. Maritime resources were in much the same neglected state in 1985 when the Maritime Initiative was started, as aircraft are today. Since 1985, the Initiative compiled and published database inventories of various historic maritime resources; wrote National Register bulletins for lighthouses, ships and shipwrecks; studied over 140 such properties for nomination as National Historic Landmarks (NHLs); and published *The Secretary of the Interior's Preservation Standards for Large Historic Vessels*.

Interestingly, the ship preservation standards proved to be nearly as useful to aircraft preservationists as they had been to ship restorers.

The NPS's partner in aviation CRM work is the Naval Historical Center, which not only supports a wide-ranging historical research and publishing program, but is also responsible for the Navy museum system and management of U.S. Navy ship and

aircraft wrecks worldwide. The Department of Defense's Legacy Program, recognizing the importance of including naval aviation in Navy history and preservation programs, funded this three-year cooperative program to address the needs of aviation preservation and archeology within the Navy. Many of the products of the cooperative effort will be useful to the other military services in preserving their aircraft and aviation sites as well.

The project is based on completing three primary elements; 1) a database inventory of all known submerged U.S. Navy ship and aircraft wrecks worldwide; 2) a National Register Bulletin, *Nominating Historical Aircraft and Aviation Facilities to the National Register of Historic Places*, and 3) a National Historic Landmark theme context study of the history of naval aviation.

The first element is to compile a global U.S. naval shipwreck and aircraft wreck site **inventory** and database

designed to serve cultural resources management purposes. It is underway, using the existing National Maritime Initiative computer database format to record information. The project is merging existing database information on wreck sites compiled by the Initiative, with information from the Naval Historical Center, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Agency, the Coast Guard, State Historic Preservation Offices, and the Minerals Management Service. As time allows, the database will be expanded through primary and secondary research.

The Inventory is the first step toward proper cultural resources management of surviving submerged naval aircraft. Museums and collectors are particularly interested in fixed wing, lighter-than-air and rotary-wing aircraft. The craft have been the subject of intense searches and recovery efforts to obtain enough parts in good condition to allow the restoration and even return to

flight condition of rare aircraft. Many aircraft have been collected from lake and ocean bottoms with little question of archeological values or ownership. The Navy



December 9, 1941 aerial view of Kaneohe Naval Air Station following the Japanese attack. Hangar No. 1, at top of photo, was burned out. The small structure immediately below it was later replaced with Hangar No. 2. Hangar No. 3 appears not to have been damaged. Hangar No. 4, at bottom of the photo, was still under construction. U.S. Navy photo courtesy National Archives.



West end of Hangar No. 1, Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, NJ, August, 1969.
Photo courtesy R.A. Hayes, U.S. Navy.

wishes to control these efforts and see that all due consideration is given to archeological research, care for potential human remains, and continued federal ownership of submerged aircraft.

The second element of the aviation CRM program is the National Register Bulletin, *Nominating Historic Aircraft and Aviation Facilities to the National Register of Historic Places*. Dr. Ann Millbrooke, an aviation historian and specialist in the history of the technology of flight, is researching, writing, gathering illustrations, and preparing this bulletin planned for publication in 1995.

The bulletin will provide the military services as well as the aviation and preservation communities with a guideline for evaluating the significance and integrity of historic aircraft and aviation facilities. This guideline is crucial to the evaluation of aviation properties within the national preservation context.

The third element is the *Naval Aviation Heritage National Historic Landmark Theme Study*. The Aviation Historical Branch of the Naval Historical Center is working with NPS to prepare a NHL theme study describing the development of U.S. naval aviation as illustrated by its surviving facilities, aircraft, and archeological sites. The theme study will include nominations of 12 to 15 properties of different types, including individual fixed wing, lighter than air, seaplane or rotary wing aircraft, crash sites, aviation support vessels, factories, airfields, testing centers and laboratories.

The study will serve as the basic framework for production of other NHL and National Register of Historic Places nominations for aviation. Sample nominations will provide a casebook on which to base future studies and can serve as a model for similar studies for other military services.

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systems, armament, and other features may add to integrity of feeling.

After evaluation, staff agreed that B-17G 44-83690 met Criteria A and C, and that exceptional significance under criterion consideration G (less than 50 years of age) was justifiable for both the date of construction (1945) and for the plane's testing role (1951, and 1956-59). Presentation of this documentation in the nomination form followed the usual format, except that the description section was broken down into a specifications format. For example, the fuselage, wingspan and airfoil type, tail assembly, and performance characteristics were described by measurements and in writing. A separate paragraph described modifications and restoration activities, and the conclusion analyzed integrity using the seven National Register aspects of integrity. The statement of significance explained the importance of this aircraft type, and detailed how 44-83690 in particular was a good representative of this now rare type.

With acceptance of B-17G No. 44-83690 to the National Register of Historic Places on June 29, 1993, the Division's historic aircraft program came to fruition. The Division hopes that this nomination will serve as a model format for the nomination of other historically significant aircraft in Indiana, and in other states as well.

¹ Although no agreed-upon standards exist, TIGHAR (The International Group for Historic Aircraft Recovery), 2812 Fawkes Dr., Wilmington, DE 19808, has published a *Guide to Aviation Historic Preservation Terminology*. Developments in maritime preservation can be applicable to aviation; the National Park Service National Maritime Initiative has published *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Historic Vessel Preservation Projects* (July, 1990) and National Register Bulletin 20: *Nominating Historic Vessels and Shipwrecks to the National Register of Historic Places* (James P. Delgado and a National Park Service Maritime Task Force, 1985). Currently, the National Park Service is preparing a National Register Bulletin, *Nominating Aircraft and Aviation Facilities to the National Register of Historic Places*.

² Flight logs are required to be maintained by the owner. Logs include flight and maintenance data, and have been mandatory since early aviation history. Copies of logs for military craft are maintained at central locations depending on the branch (Air Force, Navy, Marines) which used the plane.

³ Scott A. Thompson, *Final Cut: The Post-War B-17 Flying Fortress: The Survivors*; Pictorial Histories Publishing Co., Missoula Montana, 1990.

⁴ In some cases, nominations of aircraft for State or local significance may be appropriate. The Pilgrim 100 B aircraft in Dillingham, AK, for example, was listed on the National Register for its historic role in the development of aviation in Alaska. Pilgrim aircraft were a favorite among Alaskan bush pilots and "served as the workhorse of Alaskan aviation in the late 1930s and early 1940s."

⁵ National Register Bulletin 15: *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation* and National Register Bulletin 16A: *How to Complete the National Register Registration Form*.

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